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I. T. A. - WHAT NEXT.

BY- DOWNING, JOHN

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THE NECESSITY OF KEEPING AN EXPERIMENTAL, OPEN-MINDED OUTLOOK TOWARD FURTHER IMPROVEMENT IN THE INITIAL TEACHING ALPHABET (ITA) IS STRESSED. A LIMITED AMOUNT OF RESEARCH HAS LED TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THE TRADITIONAL ORTHOGRAPHY OF ENGLISH IS AN IMPORTANT CAUSE OF DIFFICULTY IN TEACHING AS WELL AS IN LEARNING READING AND WRITING IN ENGLISH-SPEAKING COUNTRIES. APPARENTLY, THE ORIGINAL ITA IDEA HAS BEEN MISCONSTRUED IN A LARGE NUMBER OF AMERICAN SCHOOLS. THE MISCONCEPTIONS IN A PUBLICATION BY V. OHANIAN (1966) "CONTROL POPULATIONS IN ITA EXPERIMENTS" ARE DISCUSSED. THESE AMERICAN ALTERATIONS ARE CONTRASTED WITH THE TYPICAL BRITISH METHOD OF TEACHING ITA EXPERIMENTAL CLASSES. FUTURE USE OF ITA DEPENDS ON RESEARCH TO IMPROVE THE WRITING SYSTEM ITSELF IN ORDER TO PROVIDE GREATER EFFECTIVENESS IN THE TRANSFER TO READING AND WRITING IN THE CONVENTIONAL ORTHOGRAPHY OF ENGLISH. INFLUENCES WHICH MIGHT HINDER THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE ITA CONCEPT ARE DISCUSSED AND REFERENCES ARE GIVEN. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED TO THE NATIONAL READING CONFERENCE (ST. PETERSBURG, DECEMBER 2, 1966). (RH)

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I. T. A. - W H A T N E X T?

By John Downing, Director of the Reading Research Unit and Senior Lecturer in Educational Psychology at the University of London Institute of Education.

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I

"Here will be an old abusing of God's patience, and the King's English."

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE - "MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR".

So must many people have thought about the introduction of the Initial Teaching Alphabet (i.t.a.),devised by Sir James Pitman, when it was first introduced into twenty British schools in my original experiment of 1961. And, no doubt, many more still feel this way in 1966 when i.t.a. has spread so far and wide for teaching reading in the English-speaking countries. Even in the special area of concern of the members of the National Reading Conference, i.t.a. is being tried. In Britain, we have numerous case histories of adult illiterates who have been brought to reading through the help of i.t.a. At the institutional level, i.t.a. is being used to teach illiterates and semi-illiterates in prisons and in the army. Now the same pattern of usage of i.t.a. for adults who need basic training in reading is developing also in the United States of America. Thus, the i.t.a.'s "abuse of the King's (or rather the Queen's and the President's) English" may seem to some to have reached even "dangerous" proportions!

However, the research which I have conducted in Britain during the past five years or so shows with great certainty that what abuses our common English language is not i.t.a., but the traditional orthography (t.o.). My research report, just published by the National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales, finds t.o. guilty of this abuse of the English language in the following verdict:

> "The unequivocal conclusion from the results of these experiments is that the traditional orthography of English is an important cause of difficulty in teaching and learning reading and writing in English-speaking countries. So long as traditional orthography is used for beginning reading and writing one must reckon that children are more likely to become confused about the tasks of reading and writing than they would be with a more simple and more regular system for English".[1]

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When, in 1960, I was appointed by the University of London Institute of Education to carry out the scientific comparison of learning to read and write in t.o. with learning to read and write with the simplified and regularised

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1 Downing, J. (1966). "Research Report on the British Experiment with i.t.a." in The i.t.a. Symposium. Slough, Bucks., England: National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales.

i.t.a. writing-system, I had no preconceptions about spelling reform. It is the objective evidence from my research which has led me to recognise the millstone of English spelling which is hung around the necks of children taking their first steps into literacy. The majority of the independent reviewers of my research report seem generally to be convinced of the validity of my conclusion, too.[2]

This is not the appropriate place to repeat the reporting of the statistical evidence which led me to this conclusion, but some idea of the importance of the difficulties caused by t.o. can be gathered if I mention just two of the most outstanding results. On tests of word recognition or accuracy, administered in the middle of the second year, children learning t.o. have only two-fifths of the reading vocabulary in t.o. that i.t.a. students have in i.t.a. Our research on children's composition shows that by the third year of school the i.t.a. student's vocabulary in writing is forty-five per cent greater than that of the average child using t.o. These are not small differences. On the contrary, it is clear that simplification and regularisation of our orthography can make a very important difference to the education of young children.

You will notice that I speak of the ill-effects of t.o., rather than of the benefits of i.t.a. This is quite deliberate and in accord with the basic aim of our research, which was directly related to the promise of the then Minister of Education of her "interest and goodwill" for such research. This she gave in response to Dr. Mont Follick's question in the House of Commons in 1953 asking if she would state her policy towards proposals by a competent research organisation to investigate possible improvements in the teaching of reading by means of "a system of simplified spelling". In our research, i.t.a. has been only an example of the many possible systems of simplification. Thus, i.t.a. is merely a vehicle for making the contrast between a simplified and regularised writing-system and the complex and irregular t.o. writing system. It should be noted at once that while we know that i.t.a. is superior to t.o. we do not know if some other "system of simplified spelling" might not be even better than i.t.a. Through being the representative of simplified spelling, i.t.a. has gathered fame and carved out a niche for itself in the teaching of literacy, but, now that the principle of simplification has been established, we cannot call a halt. We must follow-up this promising line of development to its logical conclusion. i.t.a. has arrived - but what comes next?

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2 See for example the comments of Drs. A. Sterl Artley and Jack Holmes published with the other reviews also in The i.t.a. Symposium. (See footnote 1)

"It was always yet the trick of our English nations!
if they have a good thing, to make it too common."

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, "KING HENRY IV, PART II"

Lately, I have been wondering how much I may be blamed for having made i.t.a. "too common" prematurely in the United States. Possibly it would have been wiser for me to have declined the honour I felt in being invited to address the Educational Records Bureau Conference in New York City in 1962. For some of the things that happened subsequently the only excuse I can offer is that it was my first visit to America and that I did not know your patterns of innovation. In my defence I may remind you that I did warn my audience in 1962 that a research program of at least ten to fifteen years should be envisaged before any final conclusions on i.t.a. per se could be drawn. Five years of research have now been completed, but while we may state with confidence that t.o. is a serious stumbling-block to literacy, the longer time is still required to determine the future development of i.t.a. itself.

However, despite these doubts about the timing of the introduction of i.t.a. into America, I believe that the essence of the original i.t.a. idea was basically a good product and one we could be proud to export from my country to yours. But now it appears to be the turn of i.t.a. to be "abused". So much so that I wonder if I did not, albeit unwittingly unleash a monster into American reading, such has been my horror in studying Ohanian's [3] description of the way which i.t.a. is being used in, apparently, a large number of American schools. Her picture of the way in which i.t.a. is being used in America is so utterly foreign to the i.t.a. classroom as found in my original experiment in Britain, that I doubt if our British i.t.a. teachers could recognise that she is writing about i.t.a. as they know it.

May I share my despair with you? Ohanian says;

"To find out all that i.t.a. is the materials prepared for children and the manuals for teachers by Messrs. A.J. Mazurkiewicz and H.J. Tanyzer published by Initial Teaching Alphabet Publications Inc. must be studied".

Well, she is wrong there for a start because i.t.a. never has been associated with any particular set of materials and teaching methodology. But what makes her even more wrong is her assumption that the Mazurkiewicz and Tanyzer Early-to-Read i.t.a. series is representative of i.t.a. everywhere. The methodology of teaching i.t.a. which Ohanian says she has found in the Mazurkiewicz and Tanyzer Early-to-Read program is quite different from that generally used with i.t.a. in Britain during my experiments and subsequently in most other schools which have adopted i.t.a. It is also quite different from the methods being used in many American schools where they have i.t.a. materials more like those used in our original

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3 Ohanian, V. (1966) "Control Populations in i.t.a. Experiments". Elementary English, Vol. 43, pp 373-380.

i.t.a. classes in Britain. Ohanian would have arrived at a quite different picture of i.t.a. teaching materials and methods if she had reviewed any one of the other major basal series in i.t.a. Thus Ohanian's description is not merely inaccurate, but it is downright wrong on point after point.

Let me list the three major errors in Ohanian's description of i.t.a.'s teaching methodology:

1 The word "early" and "earlier" seem important in her description of beginning reading with i.t.a. Here she has probably been misled by the title of the Mazurkiewicz and Tanyzer series "Early-to-Read". In contrast a genuine concern for individual differences in reading readiness is a feature of the use of i.t.a. by informed teachers in Britain. There has been no attempt to push reading at an earlier age than usual.

2 Ohanian says:

(a) "A basic sight word list is not an important consideration".

(b) "Learning phonic clues precedes the learning of word wholes".

These generalisations are far from the truth of what was and still is usually done in i.t.a. classrooms in Britain. There the general rule has been to continue to use a Look-Say approach for the very first beginning stage in i.t.a. There are two chief reasons for this:

(a) Whether one is using t.o. or i.t.a. or any other writing-system for English, the rationale of Look-Say is unaffected. Look-Say was not introduced because grapheme-phoneme relations is English are rather obscure. Indeed, Look-Say has been widely adopted in countries, like Turkey, and many of the Spanish-speaking countries whose languages do have highly regular grapheme-phoneme relations. The thinking behind the Look-Say approach is that it gives the correct orientation for the purpose of reading. The young child taught from the beginning by formal phonic drills is liable to learn the erroneous notion that reading is making noises to letters, and therefore to develop the corresponding "barking at print" habits which are so difficult to unlearn. In contrast, the Look-Say approach points out the true goal of reading from the outset - to obtain meaning from the printed page, to obtain information and enjoyment from books. This view of reading remains unshaken by i.t.a.

(b) The second reason for maintaining a meaningful Look-Say approach in i.t.a. is of even greater importance. To change to a phonic beginning for i.t.a. is to throw away i.t.a.'s primary virtue. This number one virtue in i.t.a. is the way in which it facilitates inductive learning and a heuristic or self-discovery approach in the "teaching" of reading.

Yet, Ohanian tells us, that on the basis of her study of the Early-to-Read series of Mazurkiewicz and Tanyzer:

> "The mode of teaching and learning is largely through telling and being told respectively and much less through guided discovery".

This is the worst misconception that one can have of i.t.a. The truth is that it is a shocking waste of i.t.a.'s potential if a "guided discovery" approach is not used in i.t.a. Hence, my despair about the use of i.t.a. in America. For instance, it would be an appalling abuse of i.t.a. to employ it to bring back dreary alphabetic work books as the child's first introduction to reading. The greater simplicity and regularity of i.t.a. makes it easier for children to discover the relations between letters and sounds, and we should grasp this opportunity to implement in the field of reading the educational philosophy which has been easier to implement in other learning tasks. Can we perhaps detect the influence of Flesch and Trace and the whole Sputnik panic in this blindness to i.t.a.'s primary virtue? In Britain, at any rate, we shall not be stampeded into a swing of the pendulum which would have us introduce i.t.a. at the cost of destroying the great advances of what Nita Barton Smith [4] has so justly termed "a truly golden period in the progress of reading instruction". The official British Ministry of Education national survey of reading in 1961 published in the Newson report [5] describes the result as a "gain in literacy" in which "teachers may well take pride". Innovation in education, if it is to be genuine progress, should be a building process, humbly adding our small brick of knowledge, upon those greater foundations laid before us. So it should be with i.t.a., but, in any case, to apply, for example, antiquated formal phonic drill methods to i.t.a.would serve only to destroy its greatest virtue in making the heuristic approach to reading so much more accessible to us.

The typical method of teaching reading in the i.t.a. experimental classes in Britain has been a well-established basal reader series trans-litterated into i.t.a., plus a Language-Experience approach, plus the class-teacher's opportunism in following closely the individual needs her students. The very significant differences between i.t.a. and t.o. obtained in our research have been derived from that teaching methodology - not the one Ohanian says she has gleaned from her study of the American Early-to-Read series. Our British teachers have used phonics, of course, but generally not at the very outset. Fortunately, the same is true of many better informed American users of i.t.a.

The importance of the Language-Experience element in our i.t.a. classes cannot be over-emphasised. The very important improvement in children's creative writing in the i.t.a. classes is i.t.a.'s second great

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4 Nita B. Smith (1965). "What have we accomplished in reading? A review of the past fifty years." Elementary English, Vol. 38, pp 141-150.

5 Ministry of Education (1965). Half our Future. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

virtue. It derives from the common practice of British infants' schools in which top priority is given to creativity. Concern for correct spelling, letter-formation, writing on or between lines is postponed, typically until the third year. This practice has been popular for many years. i.t.a.'s contribution has been to make it more successful.

Also, we should not minimise the importance of the freedom given to teachers to respond to the children's individual needs as they have learned to read and write with i.t.a. in the British experiments. Regimentation of methodology through authoritarian teachers' manuals and the rut of work books is again wasteful of i.t.a.'s potential.

3 Ohanian's third cardinal error arising from her view of i.t.a. which she says is based on her study of the Early-to-Read series, is her statement that transfer from i.t.a. to t.o. "is encouraged and achieved usually about April and May" (in first grade).

She is very much mistaken and this is a dangerous/misleading error. In our original i.t.a. experiment we found that less than half of the sample had begun transition by mid-second-year. In a second replication experiment, only seventeen per cent had begun transition by that time.[6] Downing and Jones (1966) reported "an increasingly relaxed attitude towards the transfer stage as the use of i.t.a. has spread and teachers have become more familiar with the notion of transfer of reading from i.t.a. to t.o." More recently, the overall summing up of the evidence on transfer from i.t.a. obtained in both our major experiments led me to make the following recommendation:

> "When i.t.a. is used for beginning reading and writing, transition to t.o. should be postponed until children are really fluent in reading i.t.a. ... This recommendation applies especially to the slow-learners. i.t.a. cannot have any benefit for the slowest ten per cent of the population if it is confined to the first two or three years of school. Indeed, twenty-five per cent of the population will be deprived of the full value of i.t.a. if it is not continued in the Junior school". (4th year onwards).[7]

The undue emphasis on transition to t.o. caused through the claim that children should transfer to the traditional alphabet "by the end of their first year in school" seems to be due to a misconception about the goals of teaching with i.t.a. This causes the waste of i.t.a.'s third great virtue. Teachers should not judge their success in terms of the number of children they have forced to "jump through the hoop" of transfer by the end of first grade (or any set period for that matter). They should judge their progress by the children's confidence in attacking the task of

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6 Downing, J. and Jones B. (1966). "Some Problems of Evaluating i.t.a. A Second Experiment." Educational Research. Vol. 8, pp 100 - 114.

7 Downing, J. (1967). Evaluating the Initial Teaching Alphabet. London: Cassell.

reading, their children's understanding of the process of communication through print and writing, their children's enjoyment and pleasure from books, their skills in reading and writing, no matter whether it be in i.t.a. or in t.o.

It is this kind of educational approach followed generally in the i.t.a. classes in the British experiments which has resulted in the improvements in reading and writing which I described earlier. I may add that by the end of the third year of school, the average i.t.a. student is six months advanced in t.o. word recognition tests and significantly ahead in speed and comprehension. He is no worse than usual in t.o. spelling by mid-third-year and by mid -fourth-year he is significantly superior in t.o. spelling. That is as far as our research has taken us with any certainty.

In our original i.t.a. experiments in Britain we deliberately avoided associating it with any particular methodology of teaching. We simply added the i.t.a. writing-system to the good approaches that were already in general use in our schools. Unfortunately, my introduction of i.t.a. into America in 1962, seems to have got caught up with the Sputnic panic with the result that i.t.a. has become wrongly associated with the methodology described by Ohanian. Educators who recognise the steady progress of Nita Barton Smith's "golden period" must reject Ohanian's image of i.t.a. The truth is that the i.t.a. experiment in Britain indicates the progressive movement in reading instruction. It shows that teachers have been right to emphasise guided self-discovery in activities related to reading. It shows that they have been right to move towards a Language-Experience approach in which the child's needs for self-expression and our need to preserve his creativity are recognised. It shows that we have been right to give priority to the development of methods which will involve children in reading from the beginning through their own interests and activities and through developing a love of books for what they contain. This is how i.t.a. has been conceived in Britain and in a good many places in America, I am thankful to see, but, if Ohanian's description of i.t.a. as used in many American schools is accurate, then i.t.a.'s three major virtues have not been grasped in those American i.t.a. classrooms.

What next? i.t.a. in America will become a temporary fad along with the other temporary fads of the Sputnic panic with which it has become associated, unless it can get into the main-stream of the development of educational progress - as it has in Britain. i.t.a. is crying out to be taken up by American educators who believe that reading and writing should come from the inside out and not from the outside in. The first time I heard Van Allen speak on the Language-Experience approach, I felt how well his ideas would be fulfilled if the writing-system used with his approach were i.t.a. The many American teachers I have met who expressed joy in Sylvia Ashton-Warner's approach to teaching the Maori children in New Zealand would find the implementation of that "philosophy" in their own classes that

much easier if i.t.a. were used. I hope that what's next for i.t.a. in America may be its adoption by such progressive educators.

"But 'tis the talent of our English nation, Still to be plotting some new reformation."

JOHN DRYDEN - "PROLOGUE, SOPHONISBA".

Some of you may sympathize with Dryden when I tell you that our research on i.t.a. has shown that i.t.a. is (as yet) by no means the ideal simplified system for English. But when in 1962 I first brought i.t.a. to America, I made it clear that the i.t.a. system itself would be the subject of investigation to see if any changes should be made in it. Furthermore, as I pointed out earlier in today's address, i.t.a. is only regarded by us at the Reading Research Unit as a representative example of the "systems of simplified spelling", the investigation of which Dr. Mont Follick asked the British Minister of Education to support.

For example, teachers' comments suggest that some of the characters of i.t.a. could be redesigned to further facilitate children's writing. Also, our analyses of children's errors in reading t.o. at the transition stage indicate that Sir James Pitman's hypothesis that transfer should take place in units of the "toh coast-line" of "word forms" is not supported. Specific causes of proactive interference, due to the fact that i.t.a. characters sometimes have different sounds to their nearest t.o. counterparts, have now been located. Thus, i.t.a.'s comparative success over t.o. is in spite of these deficiencies within the total i.t.a. system. Obviously, what's next in i.t.a. must include research on improvements to this writing-system itself. This we envisaged from the very beginning, and our position was best stated by Sir Cyril Burt:

> "Even supposing that these novel proposals turn out to be more effective than any of the earlier ones, it still would not follow that they are the best that could be devised."[8]

Now that we know the magnitude of the improvement in reading and writing which can be obtained by means of a simplified spelling system for English, it would be negligent not to establish through further research what would be the ideal system for present-day practical purposes. Therefore, in the conclusions to my report in The i.t.a. Symposium,[9] I have proposed:

> "If the Initial Teaching Alphabet or some other transitional system is to be taken up and more widely used, as seems likely from current trends, then urgent consideration should be given to this need for a series of laboratory studies to shape the new system to provide greater effectiveness in transfer to reading and writing in the conventional orthography of English."

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8 Burt, C. (1962). Preface in Downing, J. (1962). To bee or not to be. London: Cassell.

9 Downing, J. (1966). "Research report on the British Experiment with i.t.a." in The i.t.a. Symposium. Slough, Bucks., England: National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales.

I have also pointed out that i.t.a. could be improved for the earlier stages when i.t.a. alone is employed.

My recommendations for improving the i.t.a. system have been strongly supported by both of the American scholars who made independent reviews of my research report: [10]

Dr. Jack Holmes states, "In summary, this reviewer heartily agrees with Downing's call for a series of experiments in the 'psychological laboratory' designed to determine how the forms of i.t.a. characters ought to be modified to maximise their transfer value to t.o."

Dr. A. Sterl Artley's comment is, "Indeed, it would be extremely unfortunate if at this stage in the development of the Initial Teaching Alphabet it were to be assumed that both the code system and the method of its use were fixed and established so that no further work on either would be necessary. Were this to take place the chances would be great that we would be operating with something less than the best. This the profession could hardly condone".

S.I. Hayakawa says in his Language and Thought in Action:

> "We are, as human beings, uniquely free to manufacture and manipulate and assign values to our symbols as we please."

Obviously, he is right from the general theoretical point of view, but, unfortunately, our freedom "to manufacture and manipulate and assign values" in i.t.a. seems to be in some doubt, at present. What should be logically next in i.t.a. may be hindered in two ways.

Firstly, there is the problem of finance. The Reading Research Unit has been generously supported by the Ford Foundation in its current i.t.a. evaluation project but, as yet, we do not know if financial support from any source will be available for the rational next step in the development of the i.t.a. avenue of research. Now that George Bernard Shaw's condemnation of English spelling has been proved right it seems an even greater shame that his Will was frustrated.

Secondly, the possibility of i.t.a.'s logical development towards a system closer to the ideal seems to be in doubt according to three published statements which suggest that i.t.a. is fixed and invariable. They all emanate from the i.t.a. Foundation set up fairly recently to promote i.t.a.

1 Patrick Gordon Walker, Consultant to the i.t.a. Foundation, speaking at Lehigh University in August 1965 stated:

> "Sir James gave freely to the world the copyright for the use of the initial teaching alphabet by publishers. But he retained the right

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10 Dr. Jack Holmes' and Dr. A. Sterl Artley's reviews of Dr. John Downing's research are contained in The i.t.a. Symposium. Slough, Bucks., England: National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales.

to supervise and, in the last resort, to insist upon conformity to the form of the letters and the way they are used to spell words." (italics added).

2 Peter Daffon, of the i.t.a. Foundation in Britain, also speaking at Lehigh University, said:

"This service enables publishers to conform to standards of spelling consistency which have been laid down by Sir James as a necessary condition for using the alphabet". (italics added).

3 The i.t.a. Foundation at Hofstra University, New York, states in its first "report":

"When Sir James Pitman developed the Initial Teaching Alphabet, he believed strongly that it should be free from the restraints of copyright and that it should be in the public domain. In doing so, Sir James stipulated that only the characters he designed be the ones referred to as the Initial Teaching Alphabet, and that the spelling rules he formulated be faithfully adhered to in printed materials". (italics added).

These suggestions that there are copyright restrictions on the use of i.t.a. are completely at variance with the position as understood by me and my colleagues at the University of London when we began the experiment. In fact, the University of London Institute of Education and the National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales in 1960 in their pamphlet appealing for financial and moral support for the i.t.a. research states clearly that there is in i.t.a. NO COPYRIGHT. The particular alphabet used above may be obtained (in 12 pt.) from the Monotype Corporation, 43 Fetter Lane, E.C. 4. Any designers' rights have been freed for all time for unrestricted use by all." In this official pamphlet,[11] no provisos or restrictions whatsoever were mentioned. Indeed, one cannot imagine that a University would have sponsored a project which entertained such restrictions as these three i.t.a. Foundation spokesmen are now proposing.

The conflict between the i.t.a. Foundation's recent statements and the original "NO COPYRIGHT" position is even more surprising because they attribute these restrictions to Sir James Pitman. As a matter of fact, he is one of the signatories of the original "NO COPYRIGHT" statement from London University. What is more, Sir James in his address to the Royal Society of Arts in London on November 23rd 1960 said:

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11 University of London Institute of Education and the National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales (1960). Some reasons why we are initiating an investigation into the early stages of learning to read, when the matter to be read is printed in a special form alleged to be easy to learn and leading easily to a full reading skill. London:University of London Institute of Education.

"The copyright in the characters has been made free to all."[12]

Nowhere in his address did he stipulate any provisos or restrictions on the future use and development of i.t.a.

I, myself, have repeated the original "NO COPYRIGHT" statement in several publications in order to encourage competitive publishing in i.t.a. and to keep open the way to further improvements in i.t.a. For example, at the Lehigh Conference in 1965, I said that my University's "declaration that there was 'no copyright' in the new writing-system impressed the reader with its implication that this was no commercial enterprise".

Dr. Edward J. Meade of the Ford Foundation at the same Lehigh Conference, made it clear that the Foundation had supported the i.t.a. research because it, too, believed i.t.a. to be free from copyright restrictions. He said:

> "The interest of the (Ford) Foundation of which I am a part in supporting demonstrations of this alphabet, <u>given to the world without condition</u>, on both sides of the ocean is simply to encourage breaks from tradition and to encourage people in the field of reading and writing to look at the medium rather than to work constantly at a refinement of the methodologies of reading instruction." (italics added).

He also said:

> "Sir James has given the copyright for the intial teaching alphabet <u>without condition</u> to the world".[13]

Dr. Meade's aim to keep open the way to further improvements in i.t.a. seems evident in the title of his address, "<u>The Initial Teaching Alphabet: A Beginning But Hardly An End</u>." He went on to declare that "i.t.a., as with any innovation, can be improved," but he, too, expressed fears that an i.t.a. cult might develop which would limit progress along this new avenue of research. He said, "one of the things I fear most is the development of an i.t.a. cult" and later "I am concerned, however, that the flurry of success with this medium, and legitimate successes in most cases, will lead many to become complacent and cause them to turn their backs on their dissatisfaction, which led them, I suspect, to develop the initial teaching alphabet". Dr. Meade continued:

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12 Pitman, I.J. (1961) "Learning to Read: An Experiment". <u>Journal of Royal Society of Arts</u>, Vol. 109, pp 149 - 180.

13 Edward J. Meade's and John Downing's statements may be found on pages 34 - 36 and page 28 respectively of Mazurkiewicz, A.J. (1966) <u>The Initial Teaching Alphabet and the World of English</u>. Hempstead, New York: Initial Teaching Alphabet Foundation.

"The i.t.a. and its uses are good, but they can be better, substantially better, I believe".

Then he concluded as follows:

"Am I satisfied with the progress of the i.t.a. to date? Certainly not! Am I certain that the i.t.a. can make even greater contributions to reading and writing? You bet! All I ask is that we work to make the i.t.a. better, to broaden its applications, or even to have it replaced by something even better. After all the i.t.a. grew out of dissatisfaction. It must not be permitted to languish and become static by early success. The i.t.a. will be useful so long as it works to improve conditions for reading and writing. The way for it to improve these conditions is for it to be constantly improving as well. The i.t.a. is out to destroy an unquestioned and outmoded orthodoxy. Let us hope that it, itself, does not become an orthodoxy." (italics added.)

Dr. Meade's words are in the true spirit of our original approach to the i.t.a. research project. We have not been attempting to validate the i.t.a. system in particular, but the general principle of simplifying and regularising English spelling. Now that we know the principle is valid we must find the best possible way of applying it. This may be an improved i.t.a. system - indeed so much improved that it may become quite different to the one with which we began.

Unfortunately, in America, Dr. Meade's call to maintain a critical attitude towards i.t.a. and thus to keep open the way to improvements in the i.t.a. system itself seems to have been misunderstood in some quarters:

1 Dr. Mazurkiewicz in his "Epilogue" to the published proceedings of the August 1965 i.t.a. Conference at Lehigh University, reports some of the phrases in Dr. Meade's title "The Initial Teaching Alphabet: A Beginning But Hardly an End" in these closing words:

"The i.t.a. has had a good beginning: this is hardly the end."

But Dr. Mazurkiewicz's "epilogue" is not a reinforcement of Dr. Meade's concern that i.t.a. shall avoid becoming a cult or developing, through complacency, a premature orthodoxy which will limit its further improvement. Instead, Dr. Mazurkiewicz gives his own account of a paper entitled "I reserve judgment" by Warren Cutts, then of the U.S. Office of Education, which (for some reason not stated) has been omitted from the published proceedings. We are told that Mr. Cutts "admitted that the increasing amount of information had made him revise his views, and he no longer was negative in his judgment."

Thus, the "beginning but hardly the end" in Dr. Mazurkiewicz's "Epilogue" has quite a different message to the one intended by Dr.

Meade. Dr. Mazurkiewicz is referring only to the acceptance of i.t.a. as at present constituted.

2 In the November 1966 issue of the Reading Teacher, Initial Teaching Alphabet Publications Inc. of New York City have an advertisement for the i.t.a. and t.o. materials of Dr. Mazurkiewicz and Tanyzer which includes the following words:

> "i.t.a. is just a beginning - a key to unlock the vast world of written language for each child."

Again, there is no suggestion that i.t.a. is "a beginning" in the sense of its being "experimental" as was meant when Dr. Meade coined the expression "i.t.a. - a beginning but hardly an end", and thus gave his wise counsel to retain an experimental open-minded outlook towards further improvement in i.t.a.

"i.t.a. - What Next?" is the question I have tried to answer to-day. The future of i.t.a. itself is difficult to predict at this moment because of the several misconceptions I have tried to clarify for you in this address. The immediate need for i.t.a. in America is to "put its own house in order". If i.t.a. does not free itself from its association with the teaching methods in Ohanian's image of i.t.a. which seem to have been brought back from the past by the Sputnik panic, if the confusion about i.t.a.'s copyright position is not cleared up satisfactorily, if i.t.a. becomes frozen into an orthodoxy supported by a cult, then i.t.a., as such, will wither away possibly within a few years. The best that I would hope for then would be that the answer to my question - "i.t.a. - What Next?" would be an entirely fresh start with a new and different simplified system free of the shackles of threatened copyright action. A new system in which professional educators and educational research workers would have absolute liberty to develop and shape the best possible simplified and regularised writing-system for literacy training in English. i.t.a. has the right to be considered for general reform only so long as it is clearly and unequivocally in the public domain. Therefore, I repeat, if there is any doubt about i.t.a.'s freedom from copyright restriction; if there is any doubt about i.t.a.'s readiness to seek further improvement within its own system; if there is any doubt about i.t.a.'s association with progressive teaching methods and liberal aims in education, then what's next clearly must be NOT i.t.a.